

**West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust**

West Hertfordshire Therapy Unit

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# ***Patient information***

**Watford General Hospital**  
**Hemel Hempstead Hospital**  
**St Albans City Hospital**

If you are unsure about anything, wait to speak to your physiotherapist or contact the ward you were on.

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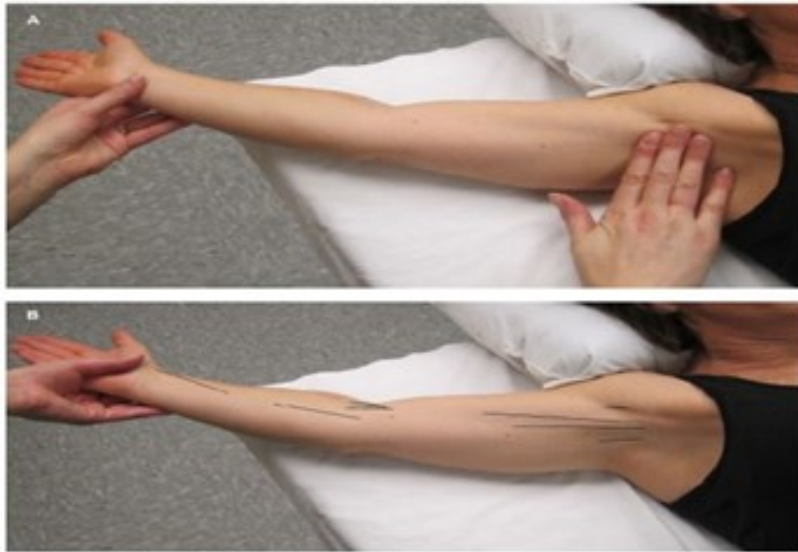


# **SCAR AND CORDING MANAGEMENT**

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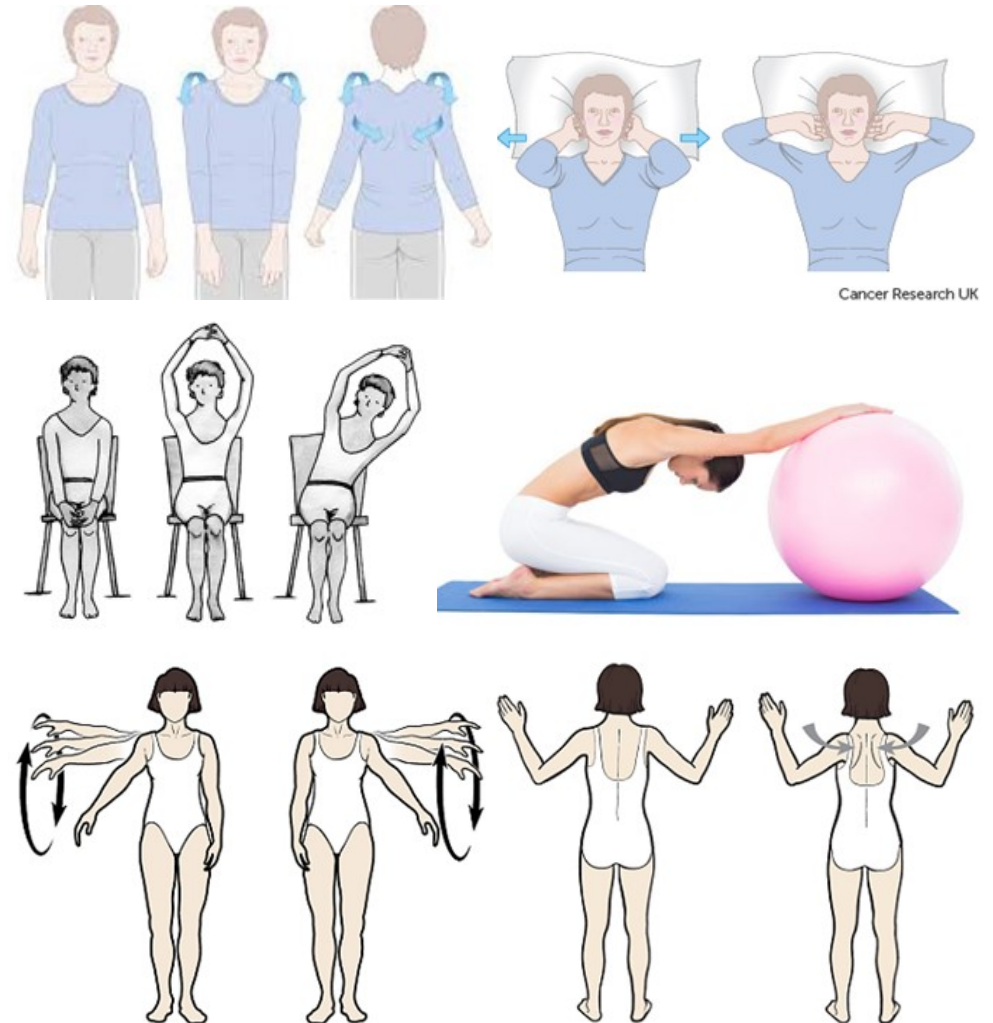


## Axillary Web Syndrome



Cording is sometimes known as axillary web syndrome. It is most common two to eight weeks after surgery and often there is a increased risk with the higher number of lymph nodes being removed. It can often feel like a rope-like structure or “tight band” which causes increased tension and restricted movement. Sometimes it can be visible or beneath the skin surface but often it can be felt along its length. Typically it is found in the armpit or can run the entire length or part of the arm; other locations can be across the breast, torso or breast bone area.

## Additional Range of Movement Exercises



Cancer Research UK

## Scar and Cording Advice

### Acute scar management

- Immediately after the wound heals the scar may still be painful, itchy or sensitive as nerve endings within the tissue are healing
- Typical appearance is red but most scars fade to a normal flesh colour with maturation
- Exercise, massage and heat application will have the greatest positive effect on acute scar management

### Mature scars

- Scar healing can last between 3 to 18 months
- The previous treatment techniques are effective with mature scar management but a more disciplined and vigorous approach is necessary
- Cording can be reduced with increase mobility of skin at surrounding scar sites and shoulder and neck movement (use post-operative exercise booklet)
- 'Popping' sounds are normal with cording release techniques - don't be alarmed
- Pain relief is effective- seek advice from your GP or pharmacy
- A cold compress is known to be effective in reducing pain and tenderness
- Regular stretching, massage and mobility is key, keep going!

## Best Position for Treatment

The best position for treatment of your cording is in a 'sunbathers pose':

- Lie on your back with your hands behind your head with your elbows resting on pillows
- Aim to get the cord on tension by moving your arm into different positions until you feel a maximal stretch
- Try rotation of your shoulder in this position or changing the height of the shoulder to increase the tension on the cord
- This is known as 'winding up the cord'



### Palpating or finding the cord:

Whilst in the sunbathers pose, use your opposite finger tips to track the cord from the armpit towards the forearm/elbow/wrist. You may need to "wind up the cord" to find its location.



## Treatment Options

Whilst in the sunbather pose you can utilise some of these treatment options to help with your scar or cording.

1. **Deep breathing techniques** – full expansion of your lungs can lead to stretching of the cord and armpit.

Technique: breathe in through your nose as much as possible until your lungs are full (remember to allow the air to reach the bottom of your lungs). Hold for up to five seconds.

Slowly exhale out through your mouth. Return to relaxed breathing to catch your breath before repeating. Complete a maximum of five cycles.

2. **Cording stretching with breathing** - reduces tightness and tension along the cord.

Technique: keep the arm in a position to maintain tension on the cord. Place web of your hand onto the breast whilst completing technique 1. On your breath out slide your hand down the cord until you feel a maximum stretch. Maintain this position throughout your deep breath.

3. **Stroking scar and cording** - de-sensitises skin tissue surrounding these areas.

Technique: Using your hand gently stroke away from your breast/armpit towards your forearm/wrist and increase the pressure as tolerated.

## Treatment Options

Whilst in the sunbathers pose you can utilise some of these treatment options to help with your scar or cording.

4. **Scar release** - scar mobility is important to help release the cord and aid scar sensitivity.

Technique: Apply pressure whilst stretching along the scar. Increase pressure and apply circular or zig-zag motions along the scar. Repeat for 5 minutes. Flat finger tips or the heel of the hand may be more comfortable for you.

5. **Kneading massage** - skin mobility targeting deeper tissues helps to increase movement along the scar and cord.

Technique: Apply pressure using the heel of your hand/palm in a circular motion along the “wound up cord”. You can add deep breaths (as in technique 1) as you increase the pressure of kneading as tolerated.

6. **Assisted range of movement techniques** - increase upper limb mobility.

Technique: If you have assistance they can help with further treatment.

Videos for the above techniques can be found at the following [here](#).